

September 2016

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Silver King and Triple B Bait Trap Gathers: The Outside Silver King Herd Management Area (HMA) Bait-Trap Gather, about 90 miles south of Ely, Nev., concluded in mid-August. The BLM gathered 105 excess wild horses and removed 104 horses. The Triple B HMA Bait-Trap Gather, about 30 miles northwest of Ely, concluded in late August. The BLM gathered 181 excess wild horses and removed 177 wild horses. *(See page 9 for more information)*

Ely District Reorganization: The Ely District is consolidating the Egan and Schell Field Offices into one field office to be named the Bristlecone Field Office. Following consolidation, the district will consist of the Bristlecone and Caliente Field Offices, and Basin and Range National Monument. The district is also realigning field office boundaries along county lines. The Bristlecone Field Office will be the point of contact for all matters pertaining to BLM-administered lands in White Pine County and the portion of Nye County within the district. The Caliente Field Office will be the point of contact for all public lands-related matters in Lincoln County. Basin and Range National Monument boundaries will remain the same. The reorganization is expected to take about six months to complete. All current offices in Ely and Caliente will remain open.

BASIN AND RANGE NATIONAL MONUMENT

Resource Management Plan: The Ely District is reviewing comments received during public input. The 51-day public scoping period concluded July 21, 2016. The BLM is scheduled to release a draft RMP for public review and comment in summer 2017. For more information or to be placed on the mailing list, contact Alicia Styles, Monument Manager, at (775) 726-8100 or blm_nv_basin_range@blm.gov.

Conservation Easement: The 30-day public comment period on a preliminary environmental assessment (EA) analyzing a proposed conservation easement to allow the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Triple Aught Foundation to grant BLM specific rights on approximately 1,300 acres of private land in and around Michael Heizer's *City* in Garden Valley concluded August 8. The preliminary EA is available online at <http://bit.ly/29tpKkt>.

The purpose of the easement is to protect the easement area, in particular *City*, from uses inconsistent with the area's conservation values; assure that the open area will remain in a combination of its agricultural, scenic, and open space condition, and prevent uses that would diminish, impair or interfere with conservation values; permit continuation of agricultural operations in and on the open area, subject to terms of the easement; and allow for public access to *City* in a manner that protects *City* and the conservation values of the property.

ELY RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Nevada and Northeastern California Greater Sage-Grouse Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment (ARMPA) in September 2015 amended the Ely District Resource Management Plan (RMP) signed in 2008. Changes to the Ely RMP from the ARMPA, as well as two other amendments, have been incorporated into the RMP. The Ely District has electronic and hard copy versions of the up-to-date, amended RMP available for the public.

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WATERSHED ANALYSIS

The Ely District continues developing and implementing watershed-level planning to identify high priority habitat improvement projects for Greater Sage-Grouse and other wildlife species, hazardous fuels reduction projects, and other actions needed to improve public land health. The district has completed the watershed analysis process for 27 of 61 priority watersheds. Implementation plans have been completed for nine watersheds. The district is currently conducting watershed planning for South Spring and Hamblin Valleys, Long Valley / Ruby Marshes and Butte Valley.

ENERGY

Natural Gas-fired Energy Development -

Toquop Energy Project: The BLM has issued a Notice to Proceed to Toquop Energy, Inc., for a natural gas-fired power plant. Construction can start once the proponent satisfies conditions outlined in the Notice.

Solar Energy Development -

Dry Lake Valley North Solar Energy Zone: The BLM in March 2016 issued the Final Regional Mitigation Strategy for the 25,069-acre Dry Lake Valley North Solar Energy Zone (SEZ) located in Lincoln County, Nev. The Dry Lake Valley North SEZ is the largest of the five SEZs in Nevada and, when fully built, could produce up to 4,000 MW of renewable energy. It is located about 15 miles west of Pioche and 15 miles northwest of Caliente. The SEZ is framed by the North Pahroc Range to the west, and the West Range, Bristol Range, Highland Range, Ely Springs Range, Black Canyon Range, and Burnt Springs Range to the east. The strategy is available on the [Dry Lake Valley North Project Website](http://on.doi.gov/1frnwSM) at <http://on.doi.gov/1frnwSM>.

Electrical Transmission Development -

TransWest Express Project: The BLM has released the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the TransWest Express Transmission Project. The Record of Decision is scheduled for release in late October 2016. The 730-mile transmission line project would extend from Wyoming, through Colorado and Utah, to southern Nevada through the southeast corner of Lincoln County and deliver up to 3,000 megawatts of electric power to major load centers, including Las Vegas and San Diego, Calif., by tapping in to wind energy resources in southern Wyoming. The BLM Wyoming State Office is the lead office for the project.

TransCanyon Cross-Tie Project: TransCanyon, LLC, has submitted to the BLM a preliminary application for a 500kV transmission line to be constructed between the Robinson Summit (500 kV) substation and the Mona/Clover (345kV) substation located near Mona, Utah. A pre-application meeting is scheduled in mid-September.

FIRE

Fire Suppression –

Strawberry Fire: Firefighters in mid-August contained the lightning-ignited, 4,657-acre Strawberry Fire burning in and outside Great Basin National Park, about three miles northwest of the Visitor Center or five miles west of Baker, Nev. The fire claimed one life, Justin Beebe, a

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member of the Lolo Hotshots based in Region 1 with the US Forest Service. Beebe succumbed to injuries suffered when struck by a tree during firefighting efforts.

Overland Fire: Firefighters in mid-August fully contained the 7,695-acre Overland Fire in White Pine County, about three miles west of the Bald Mountain Mine or five miles south of the Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge. The lightning-ignited fire consumed pinion-juniper, brush and grasses in mule deer, elk and pronghorn antelope habitat. Approximately 81 acres of Greater Sage Grouse general habitat also burned.

Line Fire: Firefighters in early August fully contained the approximately 832-acre Line Fire, about 18 miles southeast of Caliente, Nev. The lightning-ignited fire burned pinion-juniper, brush and grasses.

Pinto Fire: Firefighters in late July fully contained the approximately 1,912-acre Pinto Fire, about 15 miles southeast of Eureka, Nev. The fire burned in priority sage grouse habitat, consuming pinion-juniper, brush and grasses. The cause of the fire is unknown.

Fuels Reduction/Habitat Restoration –

Ward Mountain Restoration Project: The BLM in late summer/early fall 2016 will issue a Decision Record based on analysis in the final environmental assessment. The Forest Service has already issued a final Decision and Finding of No Significant Impact. The BLM, Forest Service and Ely Shoshone Tribe are partnering on the project that would use manual and mechanical treatment methods and prescribed fire to restore vegetative health and improve wildlife habitat, as well as reduce the catastrophic wildfire risk on Ward Mountain. The proposed 100,000-acre project area consists of 53,731 acres of the public lands, 39,264 acres of Forest Service lands, and 2,507 acres of Tribal lands.

Overland Pass Habitat Improvement Project: The BLM in summer 2016 will start manually thinning pinion-juniper on about 6,000 acres along the southern flank of the Ruby Mountains in Elko and White Pine counties. Chaining will begin south of Overland Pass Road in fall 2016. Over a 10-year period, about 18,500 acres of a 45,200-acre project area will be treated using manual and mechanical methods and prescribed fire. The wildlife habitat improvement project that will benefit Greater Sage-grouse, mule deer, pronghorn antelope and more is collaboration between the BLM, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, and Nevada Department of Wildlife.

Kern Mountain Landscape Restoration Project: The BLM in 2016-2017 will burn slash piles remaining from pinion-juniper thinning treatments completed in 2015. The finished project will restore watershed health, reduce catastrophic wildfire risk, and improve wildlife habitat, including that of Greater Sage-grouse.

Bristlecone and Johnson Basins Restoration Project: The BLM in fall 2016 will release for public review and comment a preliminary environmental assessment for a project that would reduce catastrophic wildfire risk and improve Greater Sage-grouse habitat in the Bristlecone and Johnson basins, five miles west of Cherry Creek. The project would treat up to 65-percent of a 35,000-acre project area. Proposed treatments include manual and mechanical pinion-juniper tree-thinning, treating invasive plant species, e.g., cheatgrass; and prescribed fire use.

Duck Creek Basin Fuels Reduction and Habitat Improvement Project: The BLM in fall 2016 will release for public review and comment a preliminary environmental assessment for a project that would improve Greater Sage-grouse habitat and create fuels breaks in urban interface areas of

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Duck Creek Basin. The proposed project would complement the already-completed work on neighboring Forest Service and private lands.

Aspen/ Sagebrush Steppe Joint Restoration Project (Great Basin National Park): The BLM in 2016 will conduct a prescribed burn in Box Canyon on Mt. Washington. When complete, the multi-year project will have restored about 1,000 acres of Aspen and sagebrush communities through the use of prescribed fire and mechanical treatments. The BLM's hazardous fuels program and SNPLMA are providing project funding.

Combs Creek: The multi-year pinion-juniper tree-thinning project calls for treating between 4,500 to 7,000 acres of the public lands in south Butte Valley, about 20 miles northwest of Ely, to improve Greater Sage-Grouse habitat. The BLM, Great Basin Institute and Nevada Conservation Corps have so far hand-thinned or masticated about 1,150 acres. The BLM in 2016 expects to masticate 300 additional acres. Acreage masticated to date has been seeded with assistance from the Nevada Department of Wildlife, which is providing Heritage Fund Program dollars for the project through the White Pine County Wildlife Advisory Board.

Patterson Pass Sage Grouse Habitat Improvement Project: Greater Sage-Grouse population monitoring began in March 2016 with the collaring and tagging of hens with GPS units. The data collected will be compared with pre-treatment data to determine the project's effectiveness. Collaborating on the project are Utah State University, Nevada Department of Wildlife, and BLM Color Country (Utah) and Ely districts.

Shingle Creek Aspen Restoration Project: Weather permitting, the BLM in winter 2016-2017 will burn slash piles of white fir. Removing the conifers promotes aspen regeneration and health. The project area is in the Snake Range near Great Basin National Park, about 40 miles southeast of Ely.

North Antelope Habitat Restoration Project: The BLM in fiscal year 2017 will masticate pinion-juniper on about 300 acres of the 12,000-acre project area. The habitat improvement project at the north end of the Antelope Range, 70 miles northeast of Ely, is approximately 85-percent complete.

Cold Springs Project: The contractor for the pinion-juniper tree-thinning project will remove the thinned trees from the project area in late summer or early fall 2016. The now-completed project provides a hazardous fuels break, as well as a demonstration area exhibiting various tree-thinning densities.

South Steptoe Valley Watershed Restoration Project: The BLM in early fall 2016 will hand-thin pinion-juniper on the west side of South Steptoe Valley near Comins Lake. The BLM will also thin pinion-juniper near Horse Camp Wash.

Lake Valley Restoration Project: The BLM in fall 2016 will resume chaining and hand-thinning pinion-juniper in Lake Valley as prescribed for in the Cave and Lake Valley Watershed Restoration Plan. The treatments will benefit potential Greater Sage-Grouse habitat.

Bald Mountain Restoration Project: The BLM expects in late summer or early fall 2016 to begin treatments in the Bald Mountain Treatment Unit of the Newark and Huntington Watershed Restoration Plan. The Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act-funded project will treat approximately 1,600 acres of the public lands to benefit wildlife, as well as restore about 25 acres of aspen.

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Newark and Huntington Watershed Restoration Project: The sage-grouse habitat improvement project is in the planning phase with BLM mapping treatment areas in the southern portion of Newark Valley. Plans call for hand-thinning pinion-juniper on about 3,000 acres of the public lands near the southern part of the Pancake Range in fall/winter 2016 with additional mastication treatments scheduled in 2017.

LANDS & REALTY

Land Sales: The Caliente Field Office is processing four rounds of land sales in accordance with the Lincoln County Conservation, Recreation and Development Act (LCCRDA). Lands to be sold are located near Alamo, Caliente, Panaca, Pioche, Rachel and Mt. Wilson. The Bristlecone Field Office is processing a Round 2 sale near Ely/ McGill in accordance with the White Pine County Conservation, Recreation and Development Act.

Land Conveyances: The Ely District is processing conveyances for 1) a State of Nevada Division of Lands expansion of state parks in Lincoln County, including Kershaw-Ryan, Beaver Dam, and Cathedral Gorge. The district is also processing conveyances to expand Ward Charcoal Kilns State Park, White Pine Industrial Park and Steptoe Wildlife Management Area, in White Pine County.

Rights-of-Ways in progress:

- Lincoln County Power District relocation of four telephone poles near the Cove
- Six roads for Steptoe Farms, LLC
- Relocation of the Robinson Mine weather station
- Emergency categorical exclusion for Nevada Department right-of-way in Rainbow Canyon
- Panaca Pit easement
- City conservation easement
- Beehive Telco upgrade of eight miles of buried cable

Desert Land Entries (DLE): The Ely District is closing out old DLEs. The Ely District is processing DLEs for 1) Kathy Smith (working with the Nevada Department of Wildlife on sage grouse and preparing the environmental assessment), and 2) Nelson Carter (State of Nevada water rights application and coordination with NDOW re sage grouse).

Miscellaneous:

- Finalizing legal descriptions in LR2000 for wilderness areas designated in the White Pine County Conservation, Recreation and Development Act and Lincoln County Conservation Recreation and Development Act
- Completing a Communication Site Plan for Kimberly Mountain

MINERALS

Active Mining Plans –

Bald Mountain Mine: The BLM Ely District, Bristlecone Field Manager on August 17 issued the Record of Decision for Barrick Gold U.S., Inc.'s Bald Mountain Mine (BMM) project. The decision allows the mining operator to expand existing gold mine facilities and construct and operate new facilities at Barrick's BMM North and South Operations Area projects. Construction

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and operation of the project will result in approximately 3,097 acres of authorized disturbance, 3,093 acres of which are on public land administered by the BLM and 4 acres are on private lands. The project is located in the Bald Mountain Mining District in White Pine County, Nevada, approximately 65 miles northwest of Ely and 40 miles northeast of Eureka.

The Field Manager's decision was to select the Western Redbird Modification Alternative along with the applicant committed environmental protection measures included in the Plan and the mitigation measures specified in Chapter 3 and Appendix A of the Final EIS, as the BLM's Preferred Alternative. The Preferred Alternative is the alternative that best fulfills the agency's statutory mission and responsibilities, considering economic, environmental, technical, and other factors. The BLM has determined that implementation of this decision with the identified monitoring and mitigation measures will not cause unnecessary or undue degradation of the public lands. The Final EIS and the Record of Decision are available on the NEPA register at <http://on.doi.gov/14R9rZ8>. Additional information is available at <http://on.doi.gov/14vXckC>.

Gold Rock Mine Project: The BLM expects to make the Gold Rock Mine Project Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) available to the public in late 2016 or early 2017. The proposed project would be located in western White Pine County, in the same geographic area as the reclaimed and closed Easy Junior Mine. The project area consists of a total of 18,745 acres of BLM-administered lands with the majority of the mine facilities located within a fenced mine area totaling 8,757 acres. A total of 3,946 acres of disturbance would be authorized. The majority of the area would be reclaimed. The action alternatives were developed to help reduce project-related impacts to greater sage-grouse and mule deer. The projected mining period is 10 years, with associated construction, closure, reclamation and post-closure monitoring periods extending the project life to approximately 48 years. GRP Inc. estimates that the project would create between 150-250 jobs.

Pan Mine: GRP Minerals has assumed ownership of the Pan Mine, formerly owned by now bankrupt Midway Gold. A new reclamation bond has been obligated and the operator is conducting exploratory drilling.

Robinson Mine Plan Amendment: The BLM is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) for a Robinson Mine-proposed amendment to its Plan of Operations. The amendment would permit expansion of mine activities onto BLM-administered land and include expanding the Ruth Pit southward, expanding the Giroux Wash Tailings Storage Facility and waste rock dumps, and the re-routing of County Route 44A. The BLM expects to complete the EA by December 2016.

Notices and Exploration –

Operations are underway the Helen A mine in Bristlecone Canyon. The BLM has cited the operator for noncompliance for violating his terms of occupancy. The operator's claim remains active, but the equipment cannot remain overnight at the site.

DHI Minerals is authorized to conduct Notice-level operations near Green Springs.

Summit Mining has two authorized operations, Cherry Creek Central and Cherry Creek East, both near Cherry Creek.

SR Minerals is conducting operations in Mining Canyon on the east slope of the Diamond Range near Legacy Bay State Mine.

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McKewen Mining is expected soon to begin work on a new authorized Notice west of Cherry Creek. They have requested bond release and closure for their Limousine Butte project, which will require inspection for reclamation work on 111 drill holes and associated roads.

The Bristlecone Field Office is preparing for public comment an environmental assessment for the Gunman exploration Plan of Operations. The Cypress Development-proposed project would be located on the eastern slope of the Diamond Range.

Mineral Materials –

The Caliente Field Office is coordinating with the Nevada Department of Transportation to obtain rights-of-way for a community gravel pit to serve Panaca, Nev., and the surrounding area. The previously-used pit is located on public lands identified for disposal in the Ely Resource Management Plan. Lands identified for disposal are withdrawn from mineral entry in accordance with the Lincoln County Conservation, Recreation, and Development Act of 2004.

Oil & Gas –

December 2016 Oil & Gas Lease Sale: The BLM is scheduled in early fall 2016 to make the preliminary environmental assessment available for public comment. The BLM is analyzing 41 parcels in White Pine County, Nev., to identify potential impacts, in accordance with the Oil & Gas Leasing Reform mandated in 2010. A Competitive Oil and Gas Lease Sale is scheduled on Dec. 13, 2016. Additional information can be found at <http://1.usa.gov/1ssQyIn>.

Oil & Gas Exploration/Development: Western Oil Exploration has requested reinstatement of one oil and gas lease and extension of another in Newark Valley west of Ely. When the leases are authorized, the operator will submit three new applications for Permit to Drill.

Applications for Permits to Drill (APD): The Basin and Range National Monument Manager in February 2016 issued a Decision Record/ Finding of No Significant Impact (DR/FONSI) and Final Environmental Assessment (EA) for Makoil, Inc.'s Murphy's Gap APD Well No. 14-23. The DR/FONSI and EA are available for review online at <http://1.usa.gov/1K1xaku>.

Bright Sky Energy and Minerals has submitted a Sundry Notice to perform hydraulic fracturing on the previously drilled Federal 1-35 exploration well in the White River Valley. The proposal requires consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The operator is discussing drilling an additional well from the same well pad, which would require a second APD.

The BLM has approved an APD for a Bestoso Oil & Gas well in White River Valley. Work is expected to begin in late summer 2016.

The BLM is reviewing a draft environmental assessment for Envy Energy's APD for the Black Point East #1 well in Railroad Valley.

The BLM is preparing an environmental assessment for Nevada Wildcat's APD for the Robber's Roost well in Butte Valley.

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NOXIOUS/INVASIVE WEED MANAGEMENT

The BLM in 2016 identified Yellow starthistle near Telegraph Canyon. Yellow starthistle is a Nevada Category-A noxious weed that has proven detrimental to agriculture in neighboring states. Containment and eradication is a top district weeds program priority.

RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

Rangeland Monitoring/Term Permit Renewals: The Ely District has identified priority allotments to be monitored in 2016 (listed below). The district is conducting monitoring in coordination with livestock permittees and in accordance with the Sage grouse Habitat Assessment Framework and the Nevada and Northeastern California Greater Sage-grouse Approved RMP Amendment. Monitoring priorities include sage grouse priority habitat management areas, wild horse herd management areas and riparian areas.

Operators and grazing allotments being monitored are, 1) Hank Vogler: North Steptoe, North Steptoe Trail, 2) Vogler, Henry C.: Chin Creek (cattle), Becky Creek, Lovell Peak, Whiteman Creek, Second Creek, 3) Need More Sheep Company: Chin Creek (sheep), Indian George, Becky Springs, Sampson Creek, Tippet Pass, 4) Southern Nevada Water Authority: Bassett Creek, Tippet Pass (Glenco Pasture), Cold Spring, Willard Creek, McCoy Creek, Meadow Creek, Majors South Spring Valley, Murphy Wash, Shingle Creek, Wilson Creek Allotment (Muleshoe Use Area and Atlanta Use Area), 5) Moriah Ranches: Sacramento Pass, Stephens Creek, 6) Cave Valley Ranch L.L.C.: Cave Valley Ranch allotment, 7) Westates Land and Livestock: Geyser Ranch, Wilson Creek Allotment Use Areas: Muleshoe, Pony Seedings, Fairview, Atlanta, 8) Collis, Chris and Karen: Connors Summit, Willow Springs. In 2017, the District will begin the rangeland health evaluation and complete the standards determination document for each of the listed allotments. To learn more, go to <http://bit.ly/1hXbukz>

RECREATION & TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLANNING

Ash Springs Recreation Site: The Caliente Field Office expects in spring 2017 to release for public comment a draft environmental assessment for a plan to manage the Ash Springs Recreation Site, located alongside U.S. Highway 93 about 100 miles north of Las Vegas. The plan would provide management direction for the BLM-administered portion of Ash Springs, addressing visitor usage and public safety, endangered and sensitive species habitat, water quality, and compliance with existing local, state and federal laws. The site is temporarily closed to the public. The closure announcement was published in the *Federal Register* in April 2016.

Lincoln County Partners Multi-Purpose Non-Motorized Trail System: The Caliente Field Manager in June 2016 issued a Decision Record and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Lincoln County Partners Multi-Purpose Non-Motorized Trail System. The trails system will enhance access to public lands by constructing new multi-purpose hiking and mountain biking trails on public lands around Caliente, Nev. Development of new trails and trailheads will not reduce access to or conflict with current recreational opportunities in the area.

Ely District Cave Management Plan: The Ely District Manager in April 2016 signed the Decision Record and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Final Ely District Cave and Karst Plan & Environmental Assessment. The Plan provides guidance for cave and karst management and provides for recreation within caves across the Ely District, while ensuring protection of resources. The Plan establishes direction for long-term management, planning, and oversight of the District's cave resources (e.g., cultural, biological, hydrological, or geological). It also

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identifies specific management actions for recreational use, scientific research, and management of cave resources.

WILD HORSES

Silver King and Triple B Bait Trap Gathers: The Outside Silver King Herd Management Area (HMA) Bait-Trap Gather, about 90 miles south of Ely, Nev., concluded in mid-August. The BLM gathered 105 excess wild horses and removed 104 horses. The Triple B HMA Bait-Trap Gather, about 30 miles northwest of Ely, concluded in late August. The BLM gathered 181 excess wild horses and removed 177 wild horses. Both gathers began in July. Hay and water was used to gather the horses.

Appropriate Management Level (AML) for the Silver King HMA is 60-128 wild horses. The current population is 807 wild horses. The purpose of the gather was to remove wild horses that continually reside outside the HMA, causing heavy to severe resource damage.

The Triple B HMA has an AML of 250-518 wild horses. The current population is 1,400-plus wild horses. The BLM monitors water sources districtwide and since late June has been hauling water to Pot Spring inside the Triple B HMA. Despite BLM efforts, water remains limited at the spring and three neighboring water sources.

WILDERNESS

Lands with Wilderness Characteristics: The BLM is performing project by project inventory updates for Lands with Wilderness Character.

SPECIAL LEGISLATION

Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act (SNPLMA): The public comment period for Round 16 concluded in July 2016. Through SNPLMA, local governmental entities may seek funds for parks, trails, and natural areas in portions of Carson City and Clark, Lincoln, and White Pine counties. Federal agencies may seek funds for capital improvements, conservation initiatives, and restoration projects in eastern Nevada. Federal, State, and other agencies may seek funding for hazardous fuels reduction in the Lake Tahoe Basin, the Carson Range, and the Spring Mountain Range. Federal agencies may also seek funding for acquisition of environmentally sensitive land statewide.

Lincoln County Archaeological Initiative (LCAI): Proposals funded through Round 9 will be announced in October 2016. Proposals under the initiative focus on the inventory, evaluation, protection and management of unique archaeological resources in Lincoln County. For more information, contact Program Manager Carol Bass at (775) 289-1803 or cbass@blm.gov.

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*This report was last updated on **Aug. 30, 2016**. Contact Chris Hanefeld, BLM Ely District public affairs specialist, at (775) 289-1842 or chanefel@blm.gov for more information on these and other projects/programs in the District.*